

PART IV CASE STUDY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the session the team member says, "How is home going?"

Mother begins to cry and says, "Not good."

Dad looks surprised.

Mother says, "There is so much yelling and Adam gets out of control."

Adam looks down and reaches for a banana, looking over to a team member for approval. The team member affirms, nodding his head.

The team member then says, "When Adam gets out of control, what do you try?"

Dad says, "Nothing works. I don't know what to do with that kid. Spanking does not work."

The team member says, "Well, there are community services that help parents get a break, when things get to be too much, for instance, ..."

Given the emotional volatility in the home and the family's need for protection, safety and well-being, the interviewer began by asking the father for his perceptions (the father was seen as the focus of power in the family). The father was asked about his family of origin: "On the Nursing History Form (L), you said that your mother was manic depressive and your father had explosive episodes. Sounds like things were really stressful when you were a child. How were things for you at school?"

The team might then listen to the father's story, retelling his story in a way that brings to light the stress he experienced as a child and its impact on his relationship to school.

From here, the father could be asked, "What are your dreams for your family? In what ways do you want a better life for them?" Throughout the father's storytelling, the team empathizes with the father's feelings and his choice of positive hopes that other family members may share. This dialogue creates a bridge to discuss Adam's need for more safety which had been revealed through the Child Strengths Checklist and Daily Strengths Scale evaluations.

Adam is greeted at school by Mr. Custodian:

During a school conference an additional problem was revealed by the teacher: "Adam has missed lots of school this quarter, which concerns me."

Adam grumbles.

Parents: "Well, he just does not want to go, I can't get him going and he just won't get out the door."

A team member turns to Adam. "How friendly are the kids and teachers at your school?"

Adam says, "A kid will beat me up."

The team member says, "Adam, have you told your teacher or principal about this kid?"

Adam says, "No, he will hurt me. I told my Mom and Dad."

Mom says, "Yes, he told me and it really upsets me. I just cannot make Adam go when someone is being mean to him and the school is not doing anything."

The team member, says, "We know the school. Your teacher, principal and counselor really want to know about this. And they will not tell any one except the grown-ups. They will help take care of it. Teacher, how can we help Adam feel welcome, safe and hopeful about school?"

The teacher says, "Adam, I am so glad you told me about this and I bet I can guess who that kid might be and we can talk about that tomorrow at school. But right now, let's think of ways to help you feel welcome and comfortable in school."

Adam sighs, "Ok."

The teacher says, "Adam, how about Mr. Custodian meeting you outside by the door and walking in with you?"

The team member asks, "Adam do you feel comfortable with Mr. Custodian?"

Celebration at home and school for one week of Adam using only a calm voice when angry (no hitting or yelling).

Phone call to teacher with parents and Adam:

A team member says, "How can we celebrate Adam going one week using a calm voice?"

Teacher says to Adam, "Adam, would you like to celebrate by having lunch together?"

Adam, says, "Ok, if you want," but his eyes light up and he is trying to contain his excitement.

A team member asks, "How would you like to celebrate at home?"

Adam responds, "I need a new video game."

The team member says, "I was thinking of something the whole family could join in together and celebrate with you ..." (pauses). The team member says, "Do you have a favorite meal your Mother makes for you, that you really like?"

Adam replies, "Yeah, macaroni and cheese."

Mother smiles and says, "I'd be happy to do that."

Acknowledgement and recognition using the child's interest in computers:

“Adam, would like to get an email from your Mom or Dad after you have gone a whole day remembering not to yell, hit or call names?”

Adam responds, “I don’t care.”

Mom retorts, “See, he just doesn’t care!”

The team member says, “I think Mom and Dad can be the leaders in this by showing that they are noticing Adam’s behavior and that they care enough to send an email about it. Mom and Dad, are you willing to try this out to help your son?”

Mom says, “Sure I will try it, but I don’t think it will do any good.”

The team member says, “Just by sending this email you are making an important statement. You are telling your son how important it is to learn how to use anger in a grown-up way and that you really care about him. Now, that is quite a statement.”

Father listens.

During the next visit the team listened to Adam’s family camping story involving each member working together in safety to create a mutually pleasurable situation. Each member’s contribution was acknowledged and the re-telling was heightened by photographs. The ABLE Team gave the family a small scrapbook to organize and preserve the pictures of their camping story.

By giving this active child, Adam, a disposable camera to take pictures of the weekend camping activities, we can enhance reflection of positive memories of the family’s successful endeavor. You may suggest that Adam photograph preparatory activities, as well. To encourage getting the film developed, that task would be written into the report as an assignment to complete for the next family appointment. At that next appointment, the photos could be admired and celebrated. For example, the customary job each family member performs to make the camping trip happen could be discussed and appreciated. Upon the family’s follow-up appointment, the story of individuals working together to create pleasure for all could be emphasized and could be a new story of family wellbeing. Adam’s family decided they wanted to keep his pictures in a memory scrapbook, which was brought to the follow-up appointment. (The Intentional Family, Wm. Doherty, Quill, (2002).

When the team could talk with Adam and his family about his aggression within the home:

“I think it is hard for Adam to remember not to yell and call names because of his impulsivity.”

To help him with that, “Adam, how would you like to fill out this paper about what kind of day you are having? Give yourself high marks when you remember to use calm words.”

“Mom and Dad, this is going to be work for Adam, but it is very important. And you can help him. When you are feeling angry, you can say something like, ‘I am mad, so I am remembering to tell you calmly what I want.’ This will give him something to look up to.”

When looking at the scrapbook, Adams father said, "Yeah, look, there is a picture of Adam doing nothing but laying around ... that is him alright."

A team member asked, "Adam, how did you get someone to take a picture of you?"

Adam says, "I asked my Mom."

The team member replies, "There it is again: You were all working together to make something happen. Adam, you look so relaxed in this picture. How were you feeling?"

Adam says, "I was happy."

The team member turns to the father and states with eye contact and warm voice, "See, Dad, you are giving your family something you always wanted to give them, something you did not have in your own childhood."

The team member instigates building on Adam's strengths to build a positive self-identity in the school.

Team member: "Adam, you are so good at being out-of-doors and you enjoy nature. I wonder if there is a way you could bring this to your school to help them know this about you. Sometimes classrooms decide to do a special project that includes taking care of the outdoors. Does your teacher know that you know about the outdoors?"

Adam answers, "No, most the time I have to stay in from recess 'cause I haven't got my worksheets done."

Team member: "Have you seen an outdoor place, like a park or playground, near your school that has trash on it? Would you like your assignment to be to find an outdoor space by your school that needs cleaning up? When we have our next appointment, we can call your teacher and tell her about the place you found that needs to be cleaned up. We could see if there is a way that you and she can talk to your class and make a plan to clean up the place."

This activity would build the child's sense of worth by directing his high level of activity to community good.